

DEVELOPING AN OPERATIONAL LEVEL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR COUNTERINSURGENCY

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**DEVELOPING AN OPERATIONAL LEVEL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MODEL
FOR COUNTERINSURGENCY**

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ABSTRACT

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Strategic communication should be operationalized in order to establish an offensive, proactive, approach to the employment of this most essential asset in the counterinsurgency fight. The center of gravity for both the insurgent and counterinsurgent at the operational and tactical level is the population. The first step to gaining the initiative from the insurgent is to understand how they are communicating their messages to the people and what the effectiveness of that message is. With that knowledge the counterinsurgent can then formulate a plan that will force the insurgent to react to the environmental and information effects created by an offensive, proactive strategic communication strategy. In order to effectively accomplish this model, strategic communication should be made a priority by making it a line of operation on equal footing with security, governance, and development within the counterinsurgency spectrum. This will ensure continuous strategic, operational and tactical leadership attention and input. The steps in developing this offensive model can be identified by answering the “five W’s” (why, who, where, what, when), and most importantly the “how” of the counterinsurgent strategic communication environment.

DEVELOPING AN OPERATIONAL LEVEL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR COUNTERINSURGENCY

The volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment of the information age has accentuated the necessity of a strategic communication paradigm that can effectively articulate our national policies and interests.

United States (US) military units are not sufficiently organized or trained to analyze, plan and integrate the full spectrum of resources available to promote America's interests.¹ Military commanders at the theater strategic, operational and tactical levels are nonetheless challenged with the vital task of how to successfully communicate information and ideas to multiple audiences, local and international, individually and simultaneously, as we fight in the counterinsurgencies of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Strategists in both wars agree with classic counterinsurgency (COIN) theorists that the real fight is for the support of the population, and that communication is essential to victory.² Of equal importance is ensuring that timely, accurate and positive information concerning these wars are presented to the policy makers and citizens of the coalition partners participating in the wars with their national treasures and the blood of their soldiers. Unfortunately, the US military has been historically ineffective in communicating accurate, truthful and positive information to these populations and international target markets because of a failure to expedite information in a proactive manner. Consequently, the information initiative is lost and the result is a reaction to the enemy's disinformation strategy. The US military has failed to achieve the desired

information effects at the strategic, operational and tactical levels due to a passive/reactive approach to Strategic Communication (SC).

Military doctrine does not adequately address this challenge. The enemy is acutely skilled at exploiting the 24/7 news cycle to exaggerate, twist, and distort the truth in order to discredit the host nation government and villainize coalition and US forces in the eyes of the local population, the Muslim people, and the international media. Al Qaeda understands that today's information age has fundamentally changed not only the speed of how people communicate, but also how people form their opinions.³ All the enemy needs is an event, not facts, to exploit their message. Abu Ghraib is a painful example of how a tactical event can have incredible strategic implications.

The general themes and messages provided by Central Command (CENTCOM), the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), do not constitute strategic or operational level guidance outlining a proactive approach to SC in the Afghan Theater.⁴ This paper provides a recommendation for a SC model for future operational level headquarters as they enter into a COIN environment.

The United States Government (USG) uses SC to provide top-down guidance relative to using the informational instrument of national power in specific situations. It is defined as:

The focused USG processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable to advancing national interests and objectives through the use of coordinated information, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.⁵

The primary military activities that support SC themes and messages are information operations (IO), public affairs (PA), and defense support to public diplomacy (DSPD). Joint Pub 3-13, *Information Operations*, defines IO as:

The integrated employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare, computer networks operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own.⁶

Joint Pub 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines PA as “those public information, command information, and community relations activities directed toward both the external and internal publics with interest in the Department of Defense (DOD)”.⁷ The same document defines DSPD as “those activities and measures taken by DOD components to support and facilitate USG public diplomacy efforts”.⁸

SC employed at the operational level in COIN is designed to effect the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of target audiences in support of USG objectives. Effectively employing the communications means listed in the previous paragraph is important in achieving the desired information effects. But actions speak louder than words. What a military unit does also sends a SC message, and arguably this is the message that the target populations receives most effectively. Military commanders must be cognizant of this and what must be anticipated and incorporated in the overall plan.⁹

This makes SC an offensive resource and much more than just individual stories and interviews to be placed in different media venues as a result of an event. SC is comprised by everything, kinetic and non-kinetic, that is done on the battlefield and

throughout the Area of Operation (AO) and Area of Interest (AI) to achieve an information effect.

As a principle of war, the term offensive is synonymous with initiative. The surest way to accomplish an assigned mission is to gain and exploit the initiative and to force an enemy to react in a desired and anticipated manner. Military commanders desire the initiative to control their environment and impose their will on the enemy.¹⁰ By employing SC as an offensive resource it is operationalized and more effectively synchronized in the operational plans (OPLANs). The operationalization of SC will establish an offensive, aggressive approach in the employment of this essential line of operation (LOO) in the COIN fight. The center of gravity (COG) for both the insurgent and counterinsurgent at the operational and tactical level is the population. The first step to gaining the initiative from the insurgent is to understand how they are communicating their messages to the people and what the effectiveness of that message is. With that knowledge the counterinsurgent can then formulate a plan that will force the insurgent to react to the environmental and information effects created by an offensive, aggressive SC strategy. While this will be a challenge because it is impossible to control the information environment 100% of the time, maintaining the flexibility to react rapidly and truthfully to unpredictable events can undermine the insurgent's message.

In order to effectively accomplish this concept SC should be prioritized as a LOO on equal footing in the COIN spectrum as security, governance, and development, ensuring continuous strategic, operational, and tactical leadership attention and input across the information environment. The steps in developing this offensive model can

be identified by answering the “five W’s” (why, who, where, what, when), and most importantly the “how” of the counterinsurgent strategic communication environment.

The first step is answering the “why”. This will identify what information effect we wish to achieve in the macro as well as with each target audience. Step two is “who and where”. Who are the target audiences that the counterinsurgent is trying to reach and where do they reside? There are risks of unintended negative second and third order information effects when delivering an effective message to the desired target audience. The key to this step is how to effectively synergize or mitigate that risk in the information environment. Step three is “what”. What are the messages that we want to be accepted by each target audience? Step four is the “when”. When do we send the messages and at what are the frequency of the messages to specific target audiences. Finally, the “how” is the most important, and it is two-fold. How do we deliver the messages? What is the best vehicle for delivery to the desired target audiences? A message can be delivered kinetically or non-kinetically, by action or deed, through the media or through interpersonal communication that can achieve the desired effect at the tactical, operational, or strategic level individually, sequentially, or simultaneously. Additionally, when delivering the message by interpersonal means the US messenger may not be the most effective. Instead key influencers within the cultural milieu of the target audience (TA) could act as a principle agent to achieve the best information effects. The second “how” is the most difficult. How do we measure the effectiveness of the message within each target audience?

Why Strategic Communication Needs to be a Separate Line of Operation

The USG instruments of national power are expressed in the acronym DIME standing for diplomacy, information, military, and economic. Diplomacy is the principal instrument for engaging with other states and foreign groups to advance US values, interests, and objectives. The informational instrument is diverse and purposely has no single center of control. As part of the US Constitution and the right to freedom of speech, information is freely exchanged with minimal government control. Information available from multiple sources influences domestic and foreign audiences including citizens, adversaries, and governments. The USG uses SC to provide top-down guidance and focus in specific situations for specific themes and messages. The purpose of the military instrument of national power is to fight and win the nations wars. The economic instrument is the free market economy itself. In keeping with US values and constitutional imperatives, individuals and entities have freedom of action worldwide. The USG's financial strategies and resources support the economic instrument of national power.¹¹

There is a clear parallel between our instruments of national power and the traditional COIN LOOs. Joint Publication 1-02 defines LOOs as “a logical line that connects actions on nodes and/or decisive points related in time and purpose with an objective”.¹² LOOs are used for synchronizing operations against enemies that hide among the populace. A plan based on LOOs coordinates the actions of joint, interagency, multinational, and host nation (HN) forces toward a common purpose. Each LOO represents a methodology along which the HN government and COIN force commander intend to counter and gain the initiative over the insurgent strategy. The desired end state is the acceptance by the people of the legitimacy of the HN

government.¹³ Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, lists examples of COIN LOOs as: Combat Operations/Civil Security Operations, HN Security Forces, Essential Services, Governance, and Economic Development.¹⁴ The FM uses the figure below to represent the individual LOOs as a single strand of rope. Once intertwined the rope becomes stronger than the individual strands. “The overall COIN effort is further strengthened through IO, which support and enhance operations along all LOOs by highlighting the successes along each one”.¹⁵

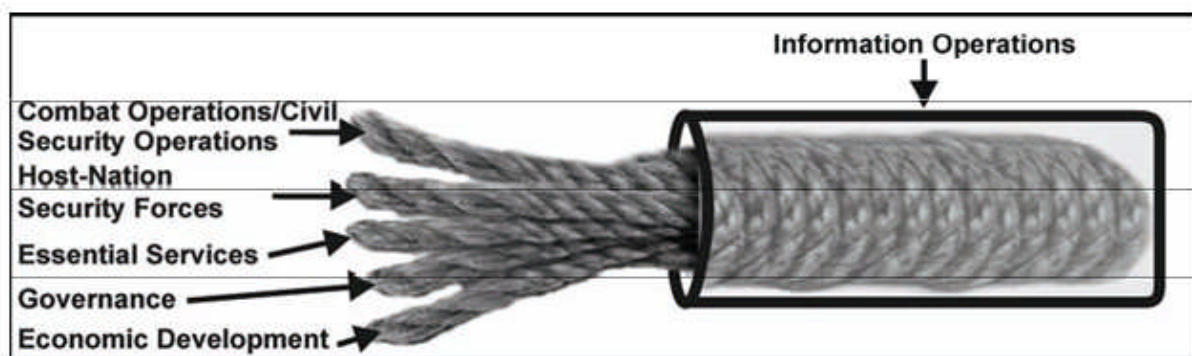


Figure 1.

Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)-82 used the same approach as is depicted in FM3-24 as it developed LOOs for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) VIII replacing IO for SC in order to better incorporate all informational capabilities and resources available to an operational level headquarters. As the headquarters prepared for the Mission Readiness Exercise a specific decision was made not to place SC as a separate LOO because it was felt that SC was an essential part of each of the identified LOOs: security, governance and development – exactly as depicted in Figure 1. In retrospect, there was an inherent flaw in this logic. Once CJTF-82 deployed, the operational level plan was assessed and evaluated on a monthly basis. Objective and subjective metrics of the commander’s vision of the desired end state of each LOO were

reviewed with the task force leadership at monthly Commander's Operational Assessment Briefing (COAB). Unfortunately, even though it was a function of security, development and governance, there was no specific evaluation criteria associated with SC. Consequently SC was not synchronized and coordinated across the LOOs with a specific objective, but rather addressed in each LOO individually. The outcome was a SC plan that was not as effective as it could have been. It did not have an overarching plan focusing efforts at the desired target audiences (people, military, government) that quickly exploited the successes of the Afghan people and government while also uncovering the brutal tactics of the enemy in their war against people of Afghanistan. What was missing by not having SC as a separate LOO was a vision from the commander of what the informational end state should be.

The key to an offensive information environment lies in clearly stated information intent. Subordinate commanders need a vision of what the commander wants the information environment to look like at the end of the military operation. This articulates what the desired perceptions and attitudes of the TAs are, and what are the information capabilities of the enemy at the conclusion of the operation.¹⁶

In *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz famously identifies a trinity of the people, the military, and the government. Clausewitz argued that the active support of each segment was critical to success.¹⁷ This trinity remains as relevant in the COIN struggle today as ever. In American society, and in this information age of a 24/7 news cycle arguably every society, the media plays a unique and important role by serving as the critical information link among the three elements.¹⁸ The effective conduct of military

operations demands effective communication with the people. Successful SC is the ability to exploit the information link.

Security, governance and development mirror the instruments of national power of military, diplomacy and economics. The missing LOO is SC to mirror information. By using SC as an offensive tool, it places it as a separate LOO on equal footing in the COIN spectrum as security, governance and development. It would require a desired end state articulated by the commander, and objective and subjective measures of effectiveness (MOE) and measures of performance (MOP) to assess its progress and effectiveness in the same forum as the other LOOs.

How the Insurgent is Employing their Strategic Communication

If resistance is equal to means times will¹⁹ - the ability of the insurgent to maintain their fight against the HN is in direct relation to the will of the people to provide active or passive support. SC influences the will of the people and their perceptions of how the HN government, and the coalition forces that are supporting them, and can provide for the needs of the people. Insurgents use their SC to affect perceptions, attitudes and beliefs as well. These perceptions become reality and, as was described in Clausewitz's trinity, is the bond that either brings the people to the government, or to the insurgent.

Yet the insurgent's SC has no responsibility to the truth and freely exaggerates and lies to ensure his message is delivered. He is not obliged to prove; he is judged by what he promises, not by what he delivers. This is also aided by the new media of the information age. The enemy can transmit the message in real time overriding editors and source requirements. Consequently, propaganda is a powerful weapon for the insurgent. With no real or positive policy but with good propaganda, he can win.²⁰

The highly respected British strategist Colin S. Gray wrote an interesting essay in 2005 offering 12 specific characteristics that can be used as an example of how the world views the American way of war. These include: Apolitical, Astrategic, Ahistorical, Problem-Solving Optimistic, Culturally Ignorant, Technologically Dependent, Firepower Focused, Large-Scale, Profoundly Regular, Impatient, Logistically Excellent, Sensitivity to Casualties.²¹ Gray's thesis of these characteristics is credible because he is not a U.S. citizen. His view therefore, allows an outside perspective on how we fight and the distinctiveness that separates us from rest of the world. Though each of these characteristics can arguably be explored within the COIN environment, it is worth focusing on some in order to better understand how the enemy could be using these perceptions against us in their effective use of SC.

Culturally Ignorant:

Americans are not inclined to be respectful of the beliefs, habits, and behaviors of other cultures... the American way of war have suffered from the self-inflicted damage caused by a failure to understand the enemy of the day.²²

Of course, this does not only apply to the enemy, but to the population where we are fighting COIN. The enemy SC will exploit every opportunity where coalition forces violate cultural traditions or norms to exasperate local or Muslim people emotions with the intent of inflaming the local populace or international community against our operations.

Technologically Dependent:

America is the land of technological marvels and of extraordinary technology dependency... American soldiers say that the human beings matter most, but in practice the American way of war, past, present, and prospectively future, is quintessentially and uniquely technologically dependent.²³

The enemy's SC exploits these both defensively and offensively. As an example from the defensive perspective the enemy exploits every opportunity to portray our use of Unmanned Ariel Vehicles (UAVs), or drones, in the media as a robotic U.S. instrument of death that is employed due to our lack of personnel on the ground and that it arbitrarily kills innocents with their Hellfire missiles. In fact the UAV was developed, and is primarily used as a reconnaissance asset. Their onboard cameras stream back real time video and provide commanders at all levels a perspective that cannot be seen by the units on the ground. They are armed and have the technology to deliver precision guided munitions, but their employment in that function is less than desired and in the event close air support is required other platforms available produce far better effects than the UAV.

The insurgent has used this dependency as an offensive tool as well. The monopoly enjoyed by nation-states over information as an element of power was lost as technology improved and as the means to transmit information became smaller, faster and cheaper.²⁴ The information explosion of the last decade has produced a wave of new media vehicles that the insurgent is effectively employing against the U.S. and its coalition partners. Islamic extremist websites grew from twenty to over 4,000 in only five years.²⁵ Individuals and non-state entities, armed with new media capabilities and unfettered by bureaucratic, moral or ethical standards will continue to use information as an asymmetrical weapon.²⁶ The paradox of this technology is that we refuse to exploit the capability ourselves and yield instantaneous information effects to our enemies.

Firepower Focused:

It has long been the American way in warfare to send metal in harm's way in place of vulnerable flesh... Needless to say, perhaps, a devotion to

firepower, while highly desirable in itself, cannot help but encourage the US armed forces to rely on it even when other modes of military behavior would be more suitable. In irregular conflicts in particular...resorting to firepower solutions readily becomes self-defeating.²⁷

Our enemy's use this "David and Goliath" analogy of firepower and proportionality with great effect. Typically, when close air support is used in a contact with coalition troops and insurgents in Afghanistan, there is a claim of non-combatant casualties by the insurgent. The mere claim is enough to garner international attention in the media. Compounded with the speed by which the insurgent posts these accusations the information effect is significant. Islamic radicals and other factions opposed to the United States have demonstrated no respect for the truth when they manufacture charges of American atrocities. While the U.S. forces take great care to avoid inflicting civilian casualties, such casualties will inevitably occur. A few injured civilians become a massacre of innocents, first in the Arab press and then often substantiated by the Western media.²⁸

Regardless of the accusations being proven false or not, the effect is achieved and the perceived civilian casualty death toll continues to climb. The media victory is won both at the local population target market as well as with the populations of the U.S. and our coalition allies. In today's information environment once the message is delivered to attempt to deny or counter it becomes largely ineffective.²⁹

Profoundly Regular:

Few, if any, armies have been equally competent in the conduct of regular and irregular warfare... As institutions, however, the US armed forces have not been friendly either to irregular warfare or to those in its ranks who were world-be practitioners and advocates of what was regarded as the sideshow of insurgency. American soldiers...have always been prepared nearly exclusively for real war, which is to say combat against a tolerably symmetrical, regular enemy.³⁰

Gray's assessment gains credence as one examines the lack of new doctrine concerning counterinsurgency in the period immediately following the Vietnam War. The U.S. Army failed to form a consensus on the lessons of Vietnam and did not accept the idea that revolutionary war requires a qualitatively different response from the conventional warfare it knows so well how to fight.³¹ Our inability to recognize or acknowledge that our forces were involved in insurgencies in both Iraq and Afghanistan is another example of our reticence as an army to engage in this type of warfare. Our enemies know this and use it to their benefit. Since the insurgent alone can initiate the conflict, strategic, operational and tactical initiative is his by definition. He is free to choose his hour and to wait safely for a favorable situation.³² An Army fighting conventional warfare tactics cannot defend adequately these asymmetric tactics. Only since new counterinsurgency doctrine was published in 2006 have we seen real progress in Iraq.

Afghanistan continues to be a challenge. New COIN doctrine is being implemented to include an understanding of the importance of SC. However, the lack of security forces (both Afghan and coalition) serving throughout the country to ensure the perception of safety to the Afghan population is working against HN and coalition forces. The enemy will continue to use their SC and their perception of our desire to fight a conventional fight against us as US forces work to convince the Afghan people, as well as international and domestic TA's of our well meaning intentions.

Impatient. "Americans have approached warfare as a regrettable occasional evil that has to be concluded as decisively and rapidly as possible".³³ The American characteristic of impatience is a result of our economic and political systems. The U.S.

is a nation of people who expect immediate satisfaction and our enemies use this against us. While both the insurgent and counterinsurgent are vying for the support of the people, so are they vying for the attention of the U.S. population. A target audience of enemy SC is the will of American people. They perceive this to be our strategic and operational COG. As evident in the Vietnam War, the American people dislike a protracted insurgency regardless of battlefield victories. Using this example as an historic defeat of the U.S. military, all the modern day insurgent has to do is survive. Winning simply means not losing. Knowing the impatience of the U.S. population time is on the side of the insurgent.

Sensitivity to Casualties:

In common with the Roman Empire, the American guardian of world order is much averse to suffering a high rate of military casualties...Both superstates had and have armies that are small, too small in the opinion of many, relative to their responsibilities. Moreover, well-trained professional soldiers, volunteers all, are expensive to raise, train, and retrain, and are difficult to replace. American society has become so sensitive to casualties that the domestic context for US military action is no longer tolerant of bloody adventures in muscular imperial governance.³⁴

October 3, 1993 is a red letter day for the enemies of the U.S. The impact of, and eventual reaction to, the loss of eighteen special operations and conventional U.S. military men on that day in Mogadishu, Somalia, has become an essential text book tactic in the strategic kitbag of our enemies. Our enemies continue to seek a similar spectacular catastrophic event for its informational effect. Though American deaths are the most effective, massive HN civilian casualties will also degrade US support of a counterinsurgency.

In addition to the mass casualties, inflicting one or two deaths a day, every day, with IEDs has the same informational effect over time. Coupled with graphic video, the act and images create a powerful negative effect on the American people.

It is safe to say that the insurgents and international terrorists in Afghanistan are using these perceptions of how Americans fight their wars against us in their SC not only to the Afghan people, but also to the international community and the U.S. population. One does not have to agree 100% with Mr. Gray to see the value of his observations. As part of a strategic intelligence preparation of the information environment, understanding how the US is perceived by others and how the enemy may use those perceptions against us in their SC, an operational headquarters can anticipate information opportunities and positively influence an offensive SC plan.

Desired Effects and Objectives for Strategic Communication

The idea that an insurgency wins or loses by its ability to win the hearts and minds of the people is an old cliché. However, like so many clichés, it happens to be true. While some insurgencies might be defeated by sheer brute force, this option is ruled out by any Western democracy today on the grounds of morality and practicality. Additionally, brute force typically only grows more insurgents. Maintaining American legitimacy while waging a COIN war, as viewed in the eyes of the world and the eyes of the US people, requires that we adhere to the high standards of behavior demanded in the Western democratic tradition. It also is critical to help allied governments fighting insurgents to win the active, or passive, support of their populations.

In September 2007 the DOD published an SC plan for Afghanistan. Within this document it outlined the desired endstate for the SC as “The Afghan people and people

in Allied and partner countries recognize and support the efforts of the Afghan government, the U.S., its Allies and partners in stabilizing and reconstructing Afghanistan. The Afghan people strongly support their government and reject insurgency, terrorism, and the narcotics trade.”³⁵ Though published by DOD and intended at the strategic level, this endstate addresses the strategic, operational and tactical levels. While the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) commanders are working directly with the population and the Afghan leadership and security forces at the provincial levels, they also have direct and continuous contact with media from both the U.S. and international press. Clearly, tactical events and actions have both operational and strategic impacts.

At the operational level CJTF-82 identified an overarching COIN approach that focused on the people of Afghanistan and sought to achieve effects in concert with the DOD plan. These effects addressed both the Afghan people as well as the insurgents. For the Afghan people those effects are: Connect People to the Government, Build Trust and Confidence in Government, and Solidify Popular Support of Government. The SC effects on the insurgents are: Separate Insurgents from the People, Limit Insurgent Options to Reconcile, Capture, Kill, or Flee, and Discredit Insurgent Vision and Ideology. This COIN approach is depicted in the following slide that was used in the CJTF-82 command brief given to VIPs visiting the headquarters at Bagram Airfield near the capital Kabul, Afghanistan.

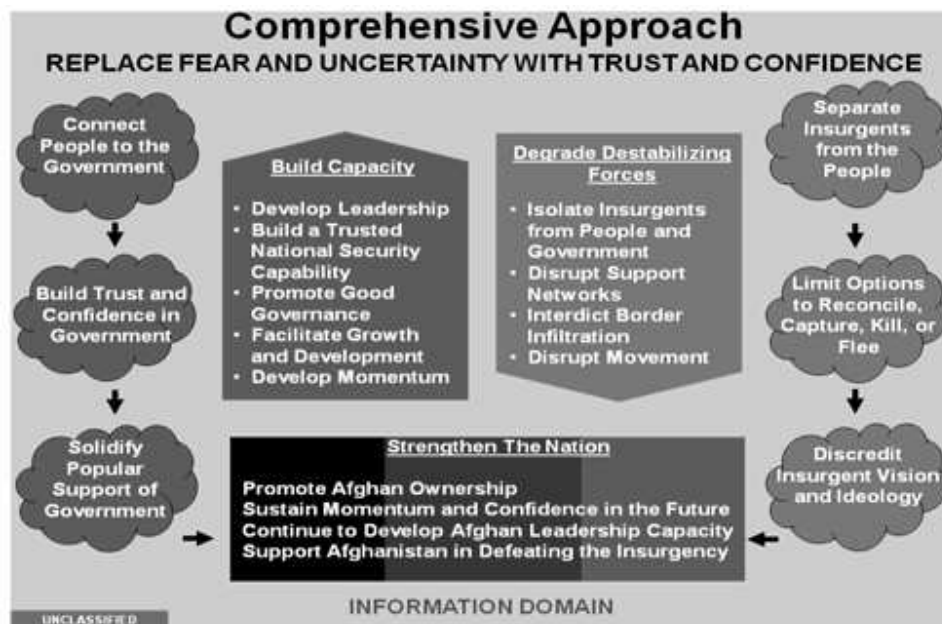


Figure 2.³⁶

In COIN the focus is more on discrediting the insurgent's SC and means in the eyes of the population than on taking out the insurgent kinetically. Insurgents are often the brothers and cousins of the population you are trying to influence. Killing or capturing them will not win hearts and minds, but may well fuel future recruits. The “win” must be based on convincing the people (and the insurgents where possible) the legitimacy of the HN government, and that their way has the best interests of the population at heart, which also means that the insurgent’s message and methods are discredited.³⁷

Identifying Target Audiences

The DoD SC Plan for Afghanistan identifies twelve target audiences (TA) at the strategic level. Those TAs are: the Afghan Population, the Afghan Government, the Government and Military of Pakistan, the Pakistan Population, Governments of ISAF Troop Contributing Nations, Populations of ISAF Troop Contributing Nations, Enemy

Leadership, Taliban Rank and File, Governments of Central Asia, Central Asian Populations, International Government Organizations (IGO) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Community, and finally U.S. domestic audiences.³⁸

While these TAs are focused at the strategic level, from an operational perspective this list is too broad. As discussed throughout this document, the primary target audience and COG in any insurgency/COIN is the people. In addition to the Afghan people, both the Afghan leadership and security forces are critical to the success in the COIN efforts and are operational level TAs. Second only to the Afghan TAs are the U.S. TAs. Operational SC can and should be directed at the U.S. policy makers as well as the U.S. population since the goal of SC is to inform and educate. ISAF contributing government leadership and populations are also critical TAs and can be effectively reached at the operational level. The final TA that can be effectively reached at the operational level is the international Muslim community.

Themes, Messages and Talking Points

Themes, messages and talking points are key elements of SC and are nested horizontally and vertically and anchored in truth. A theme is a topic of discourse or discussion that is used by strategic communicators and directed to a TA in order for them to understand and accept an idea or concept. An example of a theme for Afghanistan could be “the Taliban are a negative force that purposely targets innocent Afghan civilians. They engage in criminal activity and brutal tactics for their own gain and cannot offer long-term solutions for the people of Afghanistan”.

A message is nested under a theme and is more specific in supporting information. Messages are directed to specific TAs. Strategic communicators deliver

the message that will resonate the most effectively. Different messages directed at different TAs can support the same theme. As an example, the following message supports the example of the theme proposed in the previous paragraph. “the Taliban seek to undermine the authority of the legitimate Afghan government. Their campaign of terror is designed to convince the people of Afghanistan that their government cannot provide security.”

Talking points are timely and truthful anecdotes specific to the message being delivered and support one of the themes. Just as there are numerous messages per theme, there can be numerous talking points per message.

The Public Affairs officer for an organization is responsible to provide the themes and messages provided from the higher headquarters and pertinent talking points to the leadership and strategic communicators. What they will not do is make a decision regarding how often messages should be delivered to the TAs. This is a leader decision. What TAs are addressed, how often they are addressed, and the frequency of the messages should be planned in advance as part of an offensive SC plan nested in the overall campaign. Critical to the success of an offensive SC plan is the consistency of themes and messages. Messages delivered to TAs should be consistent and frequent. Measureable objectives should be established as part of the SC LOO with measures of effectiveness (MOE) identified for those objectives. MOE must be part of initial planning such that a baseline can be established against which to measure. A key function of the MOE will be to determine if the frequency of messaging is adequate; whether or not the message is resonating with the TA. One MOE for determining whether a message is resonating with a TA is if the message is repeated or supported

by that TA. Determining the correct frequency of messages delivered to the correct TA, and incorporating that as a pillar of the operation is the goal of a proactive, offensive SC plan. This defines the operationalization of SC. How SC is synchronized within the campaign ensures the seamless application of this LOO.

Synchronizing SC with the other LOOs – The Joint Effects Process

The synchronization of SC with all the kinetic and non-kinetic resources and assets across a combined-joint task force is a daunting challenge and can only be accomplished by the direct involvement and monitoring of the top leadership and staff of an organization. In order to synchronize SC it must be planned in advance and in concert with the other LOOs. This Joint Effects Process (JEP) is done at the operational staff level under the direct supervision and guidance of the commander and his key subordinates (deputy commander, chief of staff, director of operations).

The operational level staff of CJTF-82 during OEF VIII had a series of boards, bureaus and cells, developed into a battle rhythm, which culminates in a monthly Commanders Operational Assessment Brief (COAB) delivered by the CJTF staff and BCT commanders to the CJTF-82 Commanding General (CG). These boards, bureaus and cells (BB&C) all had their own specific designated outputs that fed linearly and sequentially to the next BB&C. The JEP is based on the standard targeting methodology of decide, detect, deliver and assess (D3A). This is both a lethal and non-lethal targeting process that supports the LOOs, their objectives and the desired effects as the basis for planning and recommendations to sustain, alter or change planned operations or events.

Objectives are defined as “the clearly defined, decisive, and attainable goal toward which every operation is directed”.³⁹ Objectives prescribe friendly goals. Effects are “the physical or behavioral state of a system that results from an action, a set of actions, or another effect”.⁴⁰ Effects describe system behavior in the operational environment. MOE are “a criterion used to assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect”.⁴¹ They are the basis of evaluating an effect. They answer the question “Is the force doing the right things, or are additional or alternative actions required?”

The JEP as articulated in D3A starts with the “decide”. Decide answers the question what can we do to achieve the desired objectives and effects with each of the LOOs? Detect identifies where we achieve the effects for maximum results. Deliver identifies who or what delivers the action that achieves the desired effect. Assess at the operational level is done at the CJ5 (Future Plans) staff section using regularly scheduled, reoccurring polling of TAs, as well as by input from the separate staff sections at the CJTF headquarters, and by getting direct feedback by the BCT commanders. The assessment is done not only for the SC LOO, but also for security, governance and development.

The JEP is conducted throughout the CJTF battle rhythm and ensures a methodical, thorough, synchronized and comprehensive method to analyze, measure and maintain the initiative in an offensive approach across all LOOs at the operational level of COIN. From the SC standpoint, the JEP confirms or denies the frequency and effectiveness of the information engagements, planned, or unplanned, across the

information environment. With that analysis and recommendations from the staff, the CG or his designee, can make the decision to increase or decrease frequency, methods or messages to each TA.

Framing a Comprehensive, Offensive SC Model

As previously stated, the CJTF reoccurring battle rhythm meetings culminates in a monthly Commanders Operational Assessment Briefing (COAB) delivered by the CJTF staff and BCT commanders to the CJTF-82 CG. The purpose of the briefing is to provide an assessment of the operational environment to the CG. Each LOO is assessed based on objectives and desired effects at the operational level, by the CJTF staff, and at the tactical level by the BCT commanders. At the end of the briefing the CG gives guidance to commanders and staff focusing on the LOOs and their respective objectives and effects. The chart used to visualize this is called the Effects Hierarchy. The guidance given provides the staff and subordinate commanders a baseline from which to work from and commanders intent through the next COAB.

The effects hierarchy becomes the visual aid that assists in the synchronization of all the LOOs toward the COIN goals articulated in the Comprehensive Approach (Figure 2.) It is the base plan for the model and ensures proactive analysis and initiative is applied to achieve the objectives.

As stated previously, SC was not identified as a separate LOO during OEF VIII, but was rather considered embedded in each of the other three LOOs. Unfortunately, by not identifying SC as a separate LOO there were no objectives or MOE established for SC and there was no systematic, reoccurring, objective method of evaluating the information effects.

Specific objectives and effects for SC within the effects hierarchy should be determined in relation to the situation and assessment of the current environment. SC objectives should be based on the number of information engagements in relation to specific TAs and the other LOOs. Desired effects for these objectives should focus on the understanding and acceptance of the messages by the specific TAs. There are multiple methods of measuring the effectiveness of the information engagements. The most objective method of knowing when you have achieved your desired effects is when your TA repeats or supports by action, word or deed, your messages. This can be determined by polling results of the population, local, international or national (US) media or news stories, quotes from key local, national, or international leaders, and the objective observations or subjective perceptions of the BCT commanders. All of these information effects and results are analyzed and presented to the CG during the COAB.

Additionally, systems need to be in place to provide a real time informational response to the events that will occur on a daily basis either through planned, or unplanned operations and actions in order to gain and maintain the informational initiative on the enemy. Everything we do and everything the enemy does have an information effect. The positive is exploited at the informational level to ensure the desired effect is achieved with the TA. The same should be done to exploit the negative enemy actions as well. These types of events become information decision points and a battle drill takes place at the headquarters in the Joint Operations Center (JOC) to quickly exploit the event and provide an offensive information engagement to desired TAs.

This is accomplished by manning an information cell comprised of public affairs and information operations representatives on the JOC floor continuously operating in the vicinity of the Chief of Current Operations, who is responsible for the day to day operations in the JOC. The information cell will provide “information ammunition” for distribution to the desired TAs in the form of an information engagement. The leadership of the CJTF must trust the judgment and capabilities of the information cell in order for this technique to be successful. This reinforces the requirement for the CJTF commander to articulate exactly what his vision is for the information end state. Using that commander’s intent the information cell can act quickly and decisively in order to exploit an information opportunity. The Chief of Current Operations, or at most the Director of Operations (CJ3), must have release authority for these information engagements.

Another responsibility of the information cell would be to manage the Commanders Web Page. This is an unclassified web page which provides a daily update of current written and visual information, accessed from internet by anyone with a computer. The Commander’s Web Page uses the internet to deliver to the desired TA’s a current, up to date information engagement that utilizes real time talking points to constantly reinforce the operational level themes and messages.

Unplanned or unintended negative actions by friendly forces, also known as “wild cards”, must also be acted upon immediately. The enemy will most certainly exploit this. Speed is critical here as well and involves both the leadership and the staff. Press releases, press conferences, interviews, phone calls to key host nation leadership and influencers, etc., takes place as quickly as possible in order to ensure this negative

event is announced first by the HN or by the Coalition Forces, and not the enemy. An explanation is given and assurance that a combined investigation is being done. This counters the sensationalism of the informational effect that the insurgent will surely attempt to convey.

The enemy has also exploited claims of non-combatant casualties following engagements where close air support (CAS) were used in support of coalition operations. Every air craft has cameras on board that record their engagements. A simple solution is to immediately release this footage which shows rifle or RPG fire coming from the house that was engaged. Unfortunately, the ability to declassify and release this type of footage to the media has been extremely bureaucratic and time consuming. By the time the release authority has been given a week has passed and the negative event has become a fact in the minds of the TA regardless of proving it false or not. Some headway has been made to improve the process, but the true fix is having the release authority at the CJTF CG level. Only by having the release authority at the operational level commander can we effectively achieve the speed to counter the enemy's disinformation capability.

Conclusion

One can look in any nationally circulated periodical, surf the internet, or flip through cable television on any given day and see an example of an unintended, or poorly articulated SC message, whether diplomatic, military or economic. Within this information spectrum, there are multiple stories of Afghanistan and the counterinsurgency struggle that the country is involved in every day. Operational level headquarters cannot be passive or reactive in how they function in the information

environment unless they are willing to accept defeat. SC is a LOO that is critical in this political and physical struggle. The JEP creates an offensive model that, when employed effectively, provides a proactive methodology that can anticipate information opportunities and maintain the initiative over our adversaries. The messages of the Afghan government and coalition forces need to be presented in a positive, truthful, and proactive manner to ensure the support of the Afghan people and the international community in a struggle with global implications.

Endnotes

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